

SU'IGA'ULA A LE ATUVASA / THREADING THE OCEANIC 'ULA: A REPORT FROM THE 10th FESTIVAL OF PACIFIC ARTS American Samoa • July 19 – 30, 2008

By Hilary Scotthorn

During the last two weeks of July over two thousand delegates from across the Pacific gathered in Pago Pago, American Samoa, for the region's largest cultural gathering — the 10th Festival of Pacific Arts. The Festival was conceived by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in 1972 as a means of promoting heritage arts and is held every four years, rotating among the three Pacific regions. Twenty-two islands sent emissaries including dancers, musicians, visual and theatrical artists, poets, traditional healers, and filmmakers for exhibition, exchange, and dialogue. Rapa Nui was represented by the musical group "Matato'a" as part of a delegation of twenty musicians, dancers, and support staff. After an arduous journey through Tahiti, Auckland, and Apia, the twenty performers and staff set up their headquarters at Kanana Fo'u Seminary, sharing the premises with delegations from Fiji, Tonga, and Australia. Meals were communal and free-time events such as soccer (football) and canoeing fostered interaction among islanders.

Already having fans around the globe, it was hardly surprising that Matato'a was very well received during the Festival. The performances provided them an opportunity for extensive regional exposure, especially since most events were broadcast live around the Pacific to seventeen other nations. While on Tutuila the group headlined a local concert at the Tradewinds Hotel and usually ended most evenings by playing to audiences in the thousands at Veterans Stadium. Their upbeat, intense shows were a festival favorite — many a local was pulled from the audience for a dance with a lovely *vahine* or handsome *matato'a* (warrior).

According to dancer Tiare Aguilera Hey, the most rewarding and significant part of the experience was the connections made on an individual level. While each performance of the group incorporated the innovative and exciting fusion music that makes them so popular, it was the continual stream of visitors to the Rapa Nui *fale* (houses) that made days meaningful and successful. In contrast to the festivals in Palau and Noumea, Pago Pago had tremendous island-wide participation and locals really enjoyed themselves walking around the festival village. Allen Araki, a percussionist with Matato'a, provided hundreds of festival-goers with facial *takona* (decoration; lit. "tattoo"). Children, teens, and adults lined up by the dozens to have him paint their faces. Though oral communication between Araki and visitors was limited due to language barriers, there was immense satisfaction with his designs,

often turning into impromptu Maori *haka* (dances).

Elise Huffer, SPC's Human Development Advisor for Culture, emphasized the unique bonds formed during the celebration:

Culture is the basis of people's lives and the festival is a unique event that brings the whole region together, allowing countries to share their diverse practices and art forms, and through these express their values. It is an opportunity for renewing past links and for forging future directions, and for intergenerational communication to take place.*

Matato'a made a significant contribution to the festival not only for the geography lesson they inherently provided to audiences but for the energetic, positive *mana* they project. Their success serves as inspiration to musicians all over the Pacific because they represent the potential for expressing culture and identity in a modern form.

The Chilean government subsidized the cost of plane tickets and Matato'a provided their own funds for various expenses once in Samoa. Sales of audio CDs and T-shirts assisted with costs, but this approach essentially excludes healers, poets, visual artists, and others from participating on the same level as compared to other delegations. For future festivals, funding should be comparable with other nations so as to completely represent all aspects of Rapa Nui culture and heritage. It is important to realize what a major contribution participation in the Pacific Arts Festival makes towards the furtherance of Rapa Nui arts and culture and should be funded accordingly.

Upcoming festivals are slated for Honiara, Solomon Islands, in 2012; and Guam, in 2016.

* See <http://www.spc.int/corp/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=253&Itemid=27>.

Note: The 9th Festival of Pacific Arts, held in Belau in 2004, attracted 2,000 participants from countries in the Pacific, including American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Easter Island, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Hawai'i, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Norfolk Island, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. For more information, visit <http://pacartsas.com/festival/history.htm>

PHOTOS FROM THE 10th ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF PACIFIC ARTS
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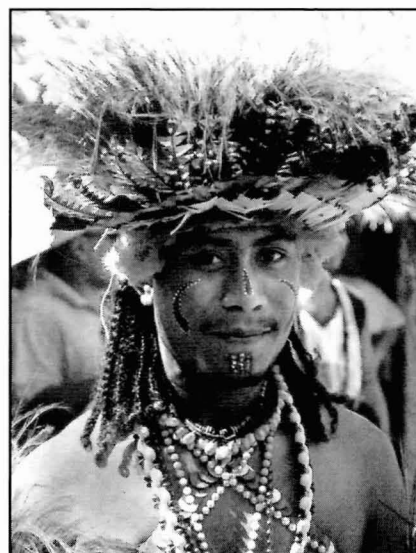
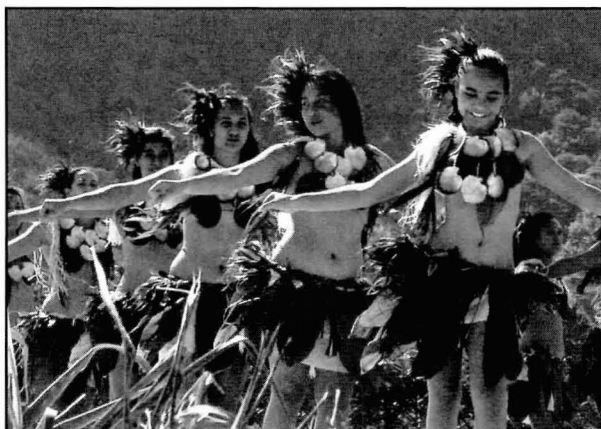


Photo Credits: Top row: (l) Cook Island dancers, T. Allen, (r) Solomon Island pan pipers, T. Allen; Middle row: (l) *takona*, H. Scothorn, (m) "Carving a Tree", T. Allen, (r) Papua New Guinean, T. Allen; Bottom row: soccer match, H. Scothorn.